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PROMOTING THE ETHICAL PRACTICE OF SAND THERAPY

Blue Butterfly

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Abstract

The "butterfly" is a symbol of the mind, soul, and transformation (Bradway & McCoard, 1997, p. 157). Jung believed that just as an acorn becomes an oak tree and a larva a butterfly, the role of the psycho-clinician is to discover and fulfill the client's innate and profound potential (The Charleston Jung Society, 2020). This absolute trust in human beings and their transformative potential is the guiding principle that Jungian psychologists should have. I must say that Jung's philosophy is especially poignant to me, as I have had such a tumultuous life that I think it is rare for someone to have achieved such great growth as I have. The butterfly transforms from egg to larva, larva to chrysalis, and chrysalis to butterfly, abandoning its old self and transforming into a new self in stages. Even though I am not as beautiful in body and mind as a butterfly, I feel a sense of familiarity with a butterfly and take my hat off to show my respect for its power of "rebirth." As I have walked the path of individuation as a Jungian-oriented psychologist, the butterfly has always been with me and guided me along my psychological journey. As a human being and a Jungian-oriented psychologist, the symbol of the butterfly has taught me about rebirth, healing, and synchronicity.

Keywords:

Kalffian-Jungian Sandplay Therapy, butterfly, symbol paper, rebirth, transformation, sandplay therapy

My first symbolic encounter with butterflies was through the separation from my first husband. I lost my first husband 20 years ago to tongue cancer. Within a year of our marriage, he developed cancer, and within a year and three months, our marriage came to an end. It was a very painful experience for me because I was in my mid-thirties and had started my married life full of hope that we would finally be able to build a happy family after marrying late in life.

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However, thanks to my Christian faith and mystical experiences, I was able to overcome my suffering as a widow and



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make a fresh start quite soon. At that time, I had not yet truly encountered Jungian psychology. Later, when I began to study Jungian psychology, I understood that my mystical experiences at that time were to be explained by Jungian concepts of symbolism and synchronicity. I believe my psychological journey as a Jungian-oriented psychologist has already begun.

A strange thing happened three days before my husband passed away. At that time, I was already aware that the day my husband was going to heaven was approaching, so I was spending my days in a foggy state of mind due to sorrow and anxiety. I recall his hospital room was on the eighth floor of a hospital in Singapore. During the hours when I could not visit my husband, I would spend my time sitting on the couch in the hallway of his hospital room, weeping alone, having Christian friends come and pray with me, and gazing blankly out the window at the view of the courtyard. It was raining hard that day. I got up and went to the window to look out and was surprised to see a big blue butterfly the size of a dove fluttering above the courtyard. I thought it was an illusion and checked several times, but it was indeed a blue butterfly. At that moment, my heart was filled with sorrow and hope. It was because I remembered what the wife of a respected professor from my college days had said to me. She said, "I had recently lost someone very dear to me, and it was very painful, but when the casket was being laid out, suddenly many butterflies came out of nowhere, and I was filled with hope. I had heard from a scholar that butterfly means soul in Italian." About an hour later, my father-in-law came rushing in with a joy and surprise look on his face. He said, "Miho, don't worry, my son will live. About an hour ago, I saw a big blue butterfly, which means my son will live longer," my father-in-law said happily and excitedly.

My husband was Cantonese-Singaporean, and in China, the butterfly symbolizes good fortune, signifying longevity, so my father-in-law may have spoken that way. However, I was still touched and calm about my synchronic experience. Because, unlike my father-in-law, I understood that the butterfly's visit to us was a sign that my husband was already departing. But departure is not an eternal goodbye. Even though we cannot see him, he will live on with his soul just as we do. We will also be able to talk with each other more deeply on another level. I was convinced of this. As if to prove it, many butterflies danced around my husband's coffin at the funeral three days later. At the funeral, I was so happy that my husband would be led to heaven and be reborn. I couldn't cry much at the funeral, and because I was smiling so much, people around me were rather worried. After my husband passed away, I could not stop collecting butterfly-patterned clothes and butterfly-shaped accessories (until now!).

Fortunately, I remarried shortly after my first husband passed away and am now happily married. However, whenever I see a real blue butterfly or butterfly figurine or pattern, I am reminded of my first husband and reflect on the lessons I learned through him. In a sense, my self-grief for my late husband is still ongoing, and I must say I have been healed extraordinarily by the personal process of Sandplay Therapy. As I work with many children in my clinical practice as a Sandplay Therapist, I have encountered, talked with, been guided by, healed by, and grown



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with "the spirit of my husband named the blue butterfly" many times in the children's sandplay box. I am convinced that my relationship with that butterfly will continue for as long as I am a Sandplay Therapist.

What kind of creature is a butterfly? Butterflies are insects that undergo a complete metamorphosis from egg to larva to pupa to adult. Butterfly larvae repeatedly molt until they become pupae (generally the fifth instar), and each molt is a major task, shedding the skin inside the digestive tract and other tracheal organs. Just before they pupate, they produce diarrhea-like feces to empty their intestines. After that, they begin to search for a place to pupate. During the pupal stage, the body remains undifferentiated, leaving the brain, the nervous system, and a portion of the muscles to be remodeled into the body of the adult butterfly, a mysterious process. Both larvae and adults of butterflies are plant-eaters, and ecologically, they occupy the position of primary consumers and serve as food resources for secondary consumers, small carnivores. This ecological order has spared the butterflies from anomalies. Butterflies spend their overwintering period as chrysalises, flying around in beautiful form from spring to fall. Unlike the pupae in summer, the pupae during the overwintering period are dormant, resistant to cold and drought, and do not die even if frozen. Butterflies sometimes migrate in groups, but it has not been elucidated what purpose they have and how they know which direction to move (Ishii, 2011).

The Japanese language has a saying, "Butterfly, flower," which is used as a metaphor for loving and caring for one's children (especially daughters), and as the saying goes, when one hears the word butterfly, images of the daintiness and beauty of its appearance usually come to mind. However, the life of butterflies as insects is more checkered and fuller of mysteries than we can imagine. They must undergo a considerable amount of suffering and endurance of rebirth before they finally attain a dimension where they can assume a beautiful form, perform a dance, and bring joy and healing to the hearts of people. Not all butterflies live a long life, and only those that survive to eat and be eaten in an ecological system will emerge as beautiful butterflies to grace the world. Jung was well aware of the symbolic properties of the butterfly. As a psychiatrist, he experienced the difficult and moving mystery of helping many people with mental illness to understand and heal their minds, as well as guiding their personal growth. As mentioned above, I am deeply moved to think that he wanted to convey this to us.

The reason why the Chinese consider butterflies to be a symbol of longevity is that the second half of the Chinese word for butterfly has the same sound as longevity (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996). Therefore, my father-in-law, who is of Chinese descent, may have rejoiced at the good news of seeing the butterfly that appeared just before my husband's death. When I saw the butterfly, there was certainly a quiet joy in me as well as a sense of loneliness. I was convinced that my husband would live on but in a different form, as a "soul." In Christianity, the butterfly is a symbol of blessing, signifying resurrection (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996). I can't help but feel as if a beautiful butterfly came to announce the fate of a new beginning in life for us, a young



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Christian couple who had to accept the fate of bereavement shortly after our marriage, taking on the form of a large dove so that the news could be clearly understood. The ancient Greek word for butterfly is "soul." For the Athenians, the butterfly is a symbolic creature of the soul, the breath of life exhaled by the dead (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996). In my home prefecture of Miyagi, there is a folk tale about butterflies and death. When a samurai traveler found an empty house, he entered to find butterflies of various colors flying beautifully like rainbows. The story goes that when he opened the shoji (sliding door) at the end of the butterfly's flight, he found a white skeleton, seemingly alive only with long black hair (Fukumusume Children's Story Book, 2020). In Thailand, my second home, butterflies are also revered as souls. The word for butterfly in Thai is "dressed soul (or spirit)." Ishii (2011) states that the butterfly crest has a fleeting image because the family crest of the Taira clan, which perished in the battle of Genpei, was a butterfly and a samurai, who always lived side by side with death, may have superimposed on the image of rebirth that the butterfly has, the thought that even after death, their descendants would succeed them and the family would continue to exist.

Jungian analyst Dr. Denise Grobbelaar (2019) says that in addition to "rebirth" and "soul," butterflies symbolize joy, lightness, and beauty and that they teach us the importance of not taking everything too seriously. The English writer G. K. Chesterton famously said, "Angels can fly because they can take themselves lightly" (Chesterton, 2022, p. 172). This can also be seen as a lesson that butterflies, which soar in the sky like beautiful fairies and angels, can teach us. When we look at the process of rebirth of butterflies, we should think that it is in the final stage, after experiencing several reincarnations, that they can fly freely and beautifully and that they finally become light-hearted and free like fairies and angels through a process similar to that of ascetic training.

Jungian-oriented psychotherapist and Sandplay Therapist Shelley Renmu Shepherd (2009) fondly recalls how butterflies blessed and welcomed her at the beginning of her ordination story. Large black and blue colored butterflies greeted Shepherd as she passed through the temple gate of Koyasan to begin her ordination practice. Shepherd chose this time of year to coincide with the great festival of Kobo Daishi's initiation and the Christian Holy Week (Passion, Death, and Resurrection). She saw the butterflies and contemplated the path of "rebirth" through the painful practice she was about to experience while at the same time reflecting on the process of healing and "rebirth" that her clients had gone through (Shepherd, 2009).

Shepherd (2009) saw clearly with her own eyes in the deep snowy mountains of Kyoto when she saw a large butterfly, signifying rebirth, in the heavy rain in the tropics, right before the actual experience of rebirth. Like so many symbols, the butterfly appeared at the time when one needed it most, in the most stunningly beautiful form, and taught her what was most important in a way that transcended words. This is the power of "synchronicity," which Jung defined as.

(1) as the "principle of non-causal linkage,"



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(2) as indicating a situation in which separate events are not causally related to each other (i.e., do not coincide in time and space), but the connection between them is meaningful, (3) as indicating a situation in which separate events coincide with each other in time and space and in which a meaningful psychological linkage is felt, (4) as a connection between the spiritual world and the material world (the material world is often, but not always, referred to as the in-organic material world in Jung's work on synchronicity. (Samuels et al., 1986, p. 36-37)

Mysterious phenomena, which do not coincide in time and space, can occur and bring deep psychological meaning. My husband, who could no longer eat or speak and was finally getting ready to die, appeared to his father and wife at different times as a blue butterfly and tried to tell them something. How the father-in-law received it will be known by the relationship between the father-in-law and the husband in the unconscious world. However, I feel that the blue butterfly in the heavy rain conveyed the following message from the husband: "Thank you, Miho. Our marriage was short, but my life has been full because I met you. I hope you will not continue to cry but look forward to the future. We both have eternal souls. Our bodies will eventually perish, but our souls will live on. I may change my appearance, but I will always watch over you. Like a butterfly, I flap my wings freely, watching over you even in heavy rain. So don't cry over me and live happily ever after."

I am not sure what color the butterfly my former father-in-law saw was, but the one I saw was blue. According to Chevalier & Gheerbrant (1996), the symbolism of blue includes depth, eternity, transparency, and emptiness, all of which are evoked by the sky and the sea, and emptiness, in particular, suggests solemnity, purity, and coldness. When I recall the blue butterfly the size of a dove, an image of the deep, austere, and sacred comes to mind, as does an image of catharsis that washes away sorrow like a heavy rain. The symbolism of the butterfly also has a healing meaning. In Irish mythology, the goddess Aedin of "Courtesy of Aedin" is the wife of the god Midir, who is turned into a puddle by the jealousy of Midir's first wife. The larva born from that puddle becomes a wonderful butterfly. That butterfly is as big as a human head and flies around the world. Its voice is as sweet as a bagpipe or harp, its eyes shine like jewels in the darkness, its smell relieves hunger and thirst, and the drops that fall from its wings heal pain and illness (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996). In the Hidden Christian Bible, Tenchi Hajimari no Koto, there is a scene in which a butterfly flies into the Virgin Mary's mouth as a sign of her Annunciation (Kawai, 2013). The butterfly is also symbolized as the soul of Christ, the Savior and Healer. At that time in Singapore, healing drops were released from the wings of the butterfly dancing in the hospital courtyard. With the drops of rain, the mud and suffering of my heart were washed away, and Christ, the source of life who dwells in the Virgin Mary, blew into my soul the breath of rebirth, and I cannot help but feel as if I have been welcomed into this world as a new person, a healer.



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In my practice and personal process of Sandplay Therapy, I have witnessed clients work through the symbol of the blue butterfly to regenerate and transform themselves, and I have had such experiences myself. Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld, a British pediatrician and pioneer of play therapy, invented Sandplay Therapy and called it the World Technique. Trained by both Lowenfeld and Jung, Dora Kalff combined Jungian psychology and Play Therapy in her psychotherapy. Kawai noted that what was important about Kalff's position was "her emphasis on the therapist-client relationship, her attempt to maximize the client's ability to self-heal, and her application of the meaning of symbols and images developed by Jung to the representations in the sandplay" (Kawai, 2012, p. 15). Kalff (1966) describes the essence of Sandplay Therapy as follows:

The analyst interprets for himself the symbols emerging in the course of a series of sand pictures. The therapist's understanding of the problem that emerges in the picture often promotes an atmosphere of trust between the analyst and the child. This trust is like the original mother-child unity and exerts a healing influence. It is not necessary to communicate the therapist's insights to the child in words, as we are dealing with the experience of the symbol in the free and sheltered space. (Kalff, 2003, p. 9)

I had a mystical experience at a Sandplay Therapy workshop in Singapore regarding the death of my husband. It was seven years after my husband passed away, and one moment, I had the urge to bury my husband's figure, which always lived in my sandplay. I held my husband's figure in my hand, buried it in the sand, made a hill, built a grave on top of it, planted a tree, and made a blue butterfly perch on a branch. This was the moment when I finally accepted my husband's death. From the beginning of the workshop, I had thought that the person I was paired with, who was observing my creation of sandplay, looked like someone I knew. When the sandplay scene was completed, and I looked at the person's face again, I realized that she looked exactly like the doctor who wrote the death certificate for my husband, and I got goosebumps. This mystical experience of synchronicity, in which the person who observed my husband's "acceptance of death" ceremony in the sandplay and looked just like the doctor who wrote his death certificate, became a resource that definitely showed me the power of Sandplay Therapy.

There have been many cases in which the client and I, the therapist, met in the collective unconscious and embodied the symbolic experience of the blue butterfly motif in a mother-child relationship. One of the most unforgettable cases is that of S, an 11-year-old girl from Northeast Africa.

S had behavioral problems, had difficulty making friends, and had a lonely school life. Still, through her encounter with me and Sandplay Therapy, she could enjoy her school life for the first time and gradually make more friends. On the day her mother came to the school for a parent-teacher conference, she visited me and said, "You have changed my daughter. You are a



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Then S smiled a little, went to the shelf of figures, found something, picked it up, hid it behind her back, brought it back to me, and said, "Ms. Miho, please close your eyes." I did as I was told and closed my eyes. "Please open your hands," she said, and I did as I was told. I could feel S placing the butterfly figure in my hands, but I did not say anything. Then S closed open hands together so that the butterfly in my hands was completely encased. "Your eyes are still closed," she said, and after about ten seconds, S said, "You can open your eyes now and look inside." I found the blue butterfly figure on my hands, and S smiled and said, "This butterfly has just been reborn." It was all I could do not to let the tears fall from my eyes, which were moistened by this beautiful and mysterious "co-transference" (Bradway & McCoard, 1997) experience.

S then began to make a sandplay image (Figure 1). The regenerated blue butterfly was in the sandplay. There were some shells and stones. It was a little different from this child's usual sandplay images and conveyed a quiet, meditative atmosphere. The blue butterfly was reborn in my hands as a therapist and symbolic mother, and I entered her sandplay box. I was able to witness the beautiful moment of symbolic acceptance of the rebirth of the blue butterfly in her psyche.

S then began playing with a life-size baby doll (Figure 2) and acted as if she was caring for it. This baby doll was used by many other children in my therapy room. One day, the doll was intensely damaged by a child who had experienced severe abuse. Another day, the doll was held

Figure 2
Life-size Baby-doll



tightly by a child with an attachment disorder. I purchased this doll when I was feeling low. At that time, I was very disappointed as I was unable to get pregnant after many attempts. When my first husband passed away, one of my coping strategies was to console myself by believing that he would be reborn as my baby one day. However, it did not happen, so I purchased this doll, and it became a symbolic object in my therapy room that helped guide the hearts of many children. (Eventually, a miracle happened, and now I am a mother of 1 year-old child, although I am in my fifties. And how miraculous it is to be writing this article in English at this moment!) When I saw how S was taking care of this baby doll, I trembled because I thought my late husband had come to see me, saying, "I will always be with you. As you work hard to heal the hearts of so many children, I live and watch over you as your favorite butterfly in the sandplay. And thank you for taking care of my soul as a baby doll." I felt as if I could hear such a talk from



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my late husband. On the 10th year memorial day of my first husband's death, who gave his whole life to teach me the meaning of "rebirth," I was able to mourn his soul in the most sacred form of "co-transference" (Bradway & McCoard, 1997) with the client in the Sandplay Therapy room.

Almost 20 years have passed since my first husband's death, and I feel that the butterfly, the symbol of my late husband, has completed one metamorphosis cycle from a chrysalis to a beautiful blue butterfly form. However, the butterfly that lives in my client's unconscious and mine will continue to die and regenerate again and again. I believe that my self-grief therapy will, in a sense, continue for a lifetime.

In her book "A Therapist's Guide to Mapping the Girl Heroine's Journey in Sandplay," Sandplay Therapist Dr. Rosalind Heiko (2018) describes the process of the Sandplay Therapy journey using the concept of a mandala. She explains that there are four doors through which the client passes. At the first door, "Pathways," the client begins the archetypal journey. At the second door, "Discernment," the client faces their fears and embodies courage. At the third door, "Harmony," the client reconciles tensions and integrates the shadow with the whole. At the fourth door, "Re-turn," the client experiences the richness of the heart. Between the second and third doors is "Illumination: Constellating the Self," the center of which can be entered again and again. This Sandplay journey applies to both boys and girls, although Heiko (2018) notes that boys typically experience "conflict" at the second door. Also, Heiko's (2018) study sheds new light on the clinical practice of LGBTQ children because it emphasizes that this journey is a "heroine's" journey, not a girl's journey.

Heiko (2018) explains and introduces the following Jewish Negin (hymn) as telling a straightforward story about the fourth door. "Return again, return again, return to the land of your soul, return who to you are, the return to what you are, return to where you are, born and reborn again" (Heiko, 2018, p. 46). Believing that one of the missions of a Sandplay Therapist is to always remember to be prepared to live with the client's story of death and rebirth, and guided by the symbol of the blue butterfly, I hope to continue to work hard to grow as a Sandplay Therapist.

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